



## Family Life the Marriage Garden

**Cultivating a good marriage** is like two people growing a healthy garden. To achieve a full and satisfying harvest, the gardeners must work in harmony with one another, using the right tools, gardening wisdom, and a willing spirit. The gardening process teaches us vital – and sometimes painful – lessons about life. The struggle is worth it: both good marriages and healthy gardens can enrich and delight us. But neither happens by chance. Let's break ground!

### **Commit: Make and honor promises.**



We start our gardens with great visions and bold enthusiasm. But, weeds, bad weather, pests, and distractions threaten our hopes and dreams. It takes more than initial enthusiasm to get from a vision of possibilities to a healthy reality. It takes steady commitment and effort. If we are unwilling to deal with problems and differences, we will never enjoy a bountiful harvest. Each of us can commit regular time and energy to caring for our garden.

### **Grow: Expand your strengths.**



The health of the garden is rooted in the health of the individual gardeners. If we do not nurture our personal strengths and abilities – or if we fail to manage our personal weaknesses – we will not be well prepared to take on our gardening tasks. The most successful gardeners know that they must invest time in reflection, learning and improvement. They then have more strengths to bring to the garden and to their gardening partnerships.

### **Nurture: Do the work of loving.**



Marriage can grow from a handful of seeds to a garden filled with colorful, radiant life. But this won't happen by accident. It will require careful attention to the well-being of the plants. We may need to increase the light of encouragement, the fertilizer of time spent together, and the water of kindness. We need to weed our destructive thoughts and actions while encouraging healthy growth. Steady investments in the relationship will assure a bountiful harvest.

### **Understand: Cultivate compassion for your partner.**



Gardening can be both rewarding and challenging. At times each of us will get sunburned, poked by thorns, and bitten by bugs. During these difficult and painful times, we can be gardening partners who compassionately respond to each other's pains rather than scold our

partner for not using sunscreen or being more careful. We can be gardeners in whose gentle hands our partners heal and grow strong.

### **Solve: Turn differences into blessings.**



We may have very different visions for our shared gardens. One gardener may favor colorful flowers, while the other insists on tomatoes and peas. These differences may not simply disappear with a calm discussion. Each partnership will have unresolvable differences. If we choose to stay calm, listen attentively, understand our partner's view, and use creativity, it is possible to turn difference into strengths.

### **Serve: Give back to your community**



When our gardens are productive, it's good to share the fruits of our labor with others. Just as you might share your tomatoes and zucchini with neighbors or gather a bouquet to cheer up a friend, so too should you work as a couple to contribute to your community. Our marriages are strengthened by serving one another and those around us. Sharing our time and resources can make our world blossom.

**Enjoy the harvest** - To have a healthy marriage garden we must nurture the best parts of our relationship while guarding against pests. If we neglect our garden we get a tangle of weeds and bugs. If we do the wrong thing (even with good intentions), we get exhaustion and failure. (This is like watering the weeds and pulling up the tomatoes!) With a little planning, a steady effort over time, and the warmth of our best selves, we can harvest sweet and enduring companionship.



### **Tips from Marriage Gardeners**

No one has the perfect marriage, but there are many couples who cultivate strong and healthy marriages. Here are some of the things these marriage gardeners do to make their marriages grow.

[http://www.arfamilies.org/family\\_life/marriage/](http://www.arfamilies.org/family_life/marriage/)



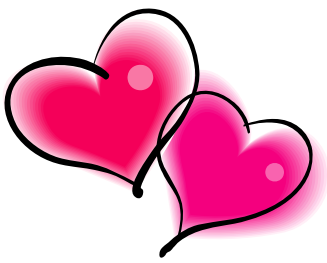
"Modern marriages require more mindfulness than marriages of the past, because we expect more of marriage, but we have not yet woken up to the fact." William J. Doherty

## **Top Ten Behaviors of a Successful Marriage**

A successful marriage can be defined as one that is able to problem solve, rely on each other during stress, continually progress, and form close bonds. These are some of the behaviors that indicate a successful relationship.

- 10. Affection – The ability to use touch in your relationship.**
- 9. Remembrance – The ability to celebrate your relationship.**
- 8. Equality - The ability to agree on how to share burdens.**
- 7. Service – The ability to do good deeds to each other.**
- 6. Kindness – The ability to compliment each other.**
- 5. Sexuality – The ability to increase physical and spiritual attraction.**
- 4. Friendship – The ability to spend time together and share common interests.**
- 3. Teamwork – The ability to work through problems as a team rather than against each other.**
- 2. Honesty – The ability to disclose your strengths and limitations with each other.**
- 1. Trust – The ability to go to your partner during pain, anger, frustration, and/or stress rather than something or someone else as a means of healing the pain.**





## Top Tips for a Successful Relationship



### *Focus on Friendship*

The basis of any happy relationship depends on friendship, respect for and enjoyment of each other's company.

Ask: What do we do to enhance our friendship?

What is the best thing about our relationship?

### *Daily Communication*

Greet each other each morning and each night. Spend 10 minutes in just "small talk" each day. Talk about what happened during the day.

### *Punctuate the Positive*

We can make the choice to be positive, to build the praise. Look for something positive to say each day.

Praise: We love it, we want it, it will make people do more of the same.

### *Build Memories and Rituals*

Take time to build happy moments and lifelong rituals. A good night kiss, celebrating special occasions, leaving a note with lunch, all build positive memories.

### *Participate in Fun Activities*

The date night is always "in". All work and no play destroys families.

### *Doing Right for Others*

Don't allow yourself to fall into the pitfall of "should haves". When we fail to do what we "should have" for our partner, we begin to build up resentment.

### *Discuss Expectations and Provide Feedback*

Learn to communicate with each other. Listen, repeat, and then talk to each other. Know what you expect from each other and have a plan to discuss issues that may cause conflict.





## Will Gender Really Matter?

### **MEN**

More self-focused  
Needs less intimacy  
Fear engulfment  
Feels less resentful  
Needs less approval  
More independent  
Often detached  
An attention-getter  
Highly competitive  
Strong drive for power/money  
Respect very important  
Often obsessed about sports  
Talks mostly about "things"  
Less talkative in private  
Takes things literally  
Language more direct  
Less responsive listener  
Decisions made quicker  
Gossips less  
Engages in put-downs  
Focuses more on solutions  
Less apologetic  
Tells more jokes/stories  
Less willing to seek help  
Boasts about performance  
Nags less often  
Often intimidates others  
Issues orders  
Often seeks conflict  
Likes to be adored  
Fearful of commitment  
Sexually jealous of mate  
Accepts other  
Thrives on receiving  
More polygamous  
More sadistic  
More sex-oriented  
Has fewer close friends  
More sensitive to stress  
More aggressive  
Has more testosterone  
Less concerned about health  
Shops out of necessity

### **WOMEN**

More other-focused  
Needs more intimacy  
Fears abandonment  
Feels more resentful  
Needs more approval  
Less independent  
Often emotional  
An attention giver  
Less competitive  
Less drive for power/money  
Respect less important  
Sports less important  
Talks mostly about "people"  
Less talkative in public  
Looks for hidden meanings  
Language more indirect  
More responsive listener  
Takes more time to decide  
Gossips more  
Engages in backbiting  
Likes to discuss problems  
More apologetic  
Tells few jokes/stories  
Seeks help readily  
Boasts less frequently  
Nags more often  
Seldom intimidates others  
Makes suggestions  
Tends to avoid conflict  
Likes to adore others  
Eager for commitment  
Emotionally jealous of mate  
Tries to change others more  
Thrives on giving  
More monogamous  
More masochistic  
More love-oriented  
Has many close friends  
Less sensitive to stress  
Less aggressive  
Has more estrogen  
More concerned about health  
Often shops for enjoyment

